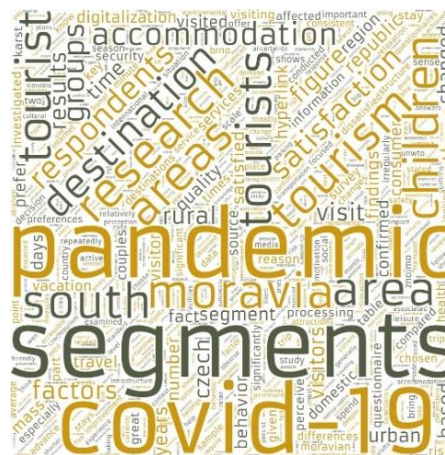


IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURIST BEHAVIOR: A CASE STUDY ON SOUTH MORAVIA

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Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly influenced tourism and has led to a change in the consumer behaviour of tourists. The purpose of the study was to find out how the profile of the visitor of the rural area had changed in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The quantitative survey with 1026 visitors was conducted and its results were analyzed within three main segments of visitors – groups with children, couples and the others (without children). The results of the research confirm the persisting fact – due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the demand in tourism is shifting from urban areas to rural ones, but overall tourists in research rural area can benefit from the fact that it is a relatively small area and can get the best of both rural areas as well as of near cities in the area. Visiting rural areas is generally a shorter-term option for all visitors, which does not require long-term planning. The findings confirmed that rural areas are a great opportunity for domestic tourism. The results bring a deeper and actual insight into the consumer behaviour of tourists in rural areas and at the same time the findings show the possibilities for service quality improvement. Both can be beneficial for service providers as well as destination managers.

Keywords: COVID-19, tourism, South Moravia, rural area, visitor behavior, service quality, satisfaction

Souhrn: Pandemie Covid-19 nepochybně ovlivnila cestovní ruch a vedla ke změně spotřebitelského chování turistů. Účelem studie bylo zjistit, jak se změnil profil návštěvníka venkovských destinací v souvislosti s pandemií Covid-19. Kvantitativní průzkum s 1026 návštěvníky byl proveden a jeho výsledky byly analyzovány u tří hlavních segmentů návštěvníků venkovských oblastí: skupiny s dětmi, páry a ostatní (bez dětí). Výsledky výzkumu potvrzují přetrvávající skutečnost, že v důsledku pandemie Covid-19 se poptávka v cestovním ruchu přesouvá z městských oblastí do venkovských. Návštěvníci zkoumaného regionu mohou však profitovat z faktu, že se jedná o relativně menší území, kde lze využít nabídku nejen toho nejlepšího jak z venkova, tak i z blízkých měst v okolí. Lze konstatovat, že návštěva venkovských oblastí je obecně pro všechny návštěvníky krátkodobým pobytem, který nevyžaduje dlouhodobé plánování. Výsledky studie potvrzují, že venkovské oblasti skýtají vysoký potenciál pro domácí cestovní ruch. Provedený výzkum představuje hlubší a aktuální vhled do spotřebitelského chování turistů na venkově a zároveň ukazuje konkrétní příležitosti pro zlepšení kvality služeb ve venkovských destinacích. Výsledky mohou být přínosné pro poskytovatele služeb i pro destinační manažery.

Klíčová slova: COVID-19, cestovní ruch, Jižní Morava, venkov, chování návštěvníků, kvalita služeb, spokojenost

Highlights

- The visitors to rural areas are mostly smaller groups, families or couples.
 - Groups with children need more security, plan the trip more in advance and stay longer.
 - The "couples" and "others without children" perceive rural areas as an easily accessible last-minute option.
 - The quality of digitalization is perceived as the weakest point of the rural area studied.
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1. Introduction and literature review

The Covid-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020 was undoubtedly an unprecedented global crisis and has negatively affected all areas of human life. Tourism which belongs to one of the largest economic sectors and recorded significant growth in the years before the pandemic (IMF, 2020) was very significantly

affected by this crisis and already in 2020, it was predicted that tourism will face a huge economic decline in the following years (Pastor, 2020). With the outbreak of the pandemic, states introduced a wide range of measures and lockdowns to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 disease, which led to restrictions on the mobility of people not only globally, but also locally. They were these restrictions that had a direct impact on tourism, when the number of international tourist arrivals worldwide fell by 71% compared to the previous year in 2019 (UNWTO, 2022a). UNWTO (2022b) reports this in concrete figures, where international tourist arrivals decreased from 1.5 billion in 2019 to 406 million in 2020.

Covid-19 made challenging times for tourism in the year 2020, nevertheless year 2021 did not bring much improvement either. The number of international tourist arrivals remained at the same level as in 2020, i.e., 71% less compared to 2019 (UNWTO, 2022a). However, UNWTO (2022b) showed in their report that the situation started to improve slowly in 2022. In the period January–May 2022, the number of international tourist arrivals increased three times (even four times in Europe), but it is still 54% less compared to the data before the pandemic in 2019. This downswing had major economic impacts. In the EU, tourism is responsible for 3.9% of GDP (EP, 2022).

2. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic was no exception and tourism in this country was also negatively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, the country accommodated 2.7 million visitors in accommodation facilities, which was 74.4% less than in 2019 (CzechTourism, 2020). The South Moravian region examined in this research was the third most affected region of the Czech Republic, and according to the summary of data from CzechTourism (2020), the decrease in the number of visitors in accommodation facilities in the year-on-year comparison with 2019 was 72.9%. The GDP of the tourism industry in the year of the onset of the pandemic in the Czech Republic fell by 1.48%, i.e., 84.3 billion CZK (ČSÚ, 2022).

As the research on this topic shows, the improvement of the tourism situation in the current years affected by the Covid-19 pandemic was mainly contributed by domestic visitors (Renaud, 2020; Gössling et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2022). Travelling closer to their homes is often stated as one of the current tourism trends (WTTC, 2020; UNWTO, 2022b) and Covid-19 pandemic just deepened this case. The evidence of this trend can also be seen in the data collected in the Czech Republic. In 2021, tourism in the Czech Republic was mostly represented by domestic tourists only (CzechTourism, 2022). International tourists began to return to the country in 2022, mainly from neighbouring countries, but domestic tourists still play a significant role in tourism and income from it (CzechTourism, 2022).

Despite visible improvements in tourism in 2022, research agrees that the recovery of tourism to pre-pandemic levels may still take years (Deb, 2020; Fotiadis et al., 2021) and the pressing demands of tourists on tourism sustainability and environmental issues when travelling will also need to be taken into account (Sanagustin et al., 2011; Valle, 2020; Ioannides and Gyimóthy, 2020; Nagaj and Žuromskaite, 2021). Efforts for sustainable travel and environmental protection also lead tourists to prefer rural areas as their destination to overcrowded urban areas. Even at the beginning of the last decade, there were studies that prove that rural areas can offer visitors authenticity and thus be an alternative to already well-known and frequently visited tourist destinations (Sanagustin et al., 2011). Even if the motivations of visitors to rural areas are heterogeneous (Eusébio et al., 2017), tourists in these rural areas are primarily looking for peace, time to relax (Carneiro et al., 2015), escape to nature (Eusébio et al., 2017; Lewis and D'Alessandro, 2019), authenticity (Sanagustin et al., 2011) and actively experience lifestyle in the countryside (Demirovic et al., 2019). Research by Kastenholz et al. (2017) summarized these motivations into four dimensions according to what tourists are looking for in rural areas – aesthetics, education, escapism and entertainment dimension. However, if a given rural area is suitable as a tourist destination, it is necessary to consider the impact that tourism will have on the people living in the area (Hwang et al., 2012) and whether this transformation will bring more profit to the area than its use for agriculture (Randelli et al., 2014).

3. Covid-19 pandemic and consumer behavior in tourism

Covid-19 pandemic brought a new issue that tourists consider when choosing rural areas, and that is security and safety. Rural areas are perceived by tourists much more positively in terms of security and health risks compared to overcrowded urban areas in which there is a greater risk of disease spreading (Porutiu et al., 2021, Rosalina et al., 2021). According to the authors Porutiu et al. (2021), rural areas are popular as tourist destinations among small groups, especially for families. The research of the authors Vaishar and Šťastná (2022) confirms the general findings about rural areas in the context of the Czech Republic. According to their research, the number of tourists who visited rural areas has increased significantly and states that tourism in rural areas in the Czech Republic has great development potential not only for domestic tourists, but also for the foreign tourists.

This shift in the perception of the risks associated with tourism after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the overall attitude of tourists and their consumer behavior before and during their travel (Villacé-Molinero et al, 2021). As already mentioned above in the text about the decline of the entire tourism industry in the years of the pandemic, a change in tourists' intention to travel can also be observed (Samdin et al., 2021). The authors Teeroovengadum et al. (2021) even estimated that the perception of risks associated with travel will persist and that Covid-19 pandemic will probably have a negative effect on tourists' intention to travel in the future. The uncertainty that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it is very much reflected in their consumer decision-making. In their report summarizing the year 2020, the OECD (2020) emphasizes that it will take a relatively long time to restore tourist confidence after the restrictions are lifted, and because of the uncertainty, tourists are delaying taking longer trips (Williams et al., 2022) and they prefer to plan trips last minute rather than several months in advance (ETC, 2022).

The authors of Samdin et al. (2021) in their research confirmed the relationship between what information is presented and available about the health safety of a given destination and whether tourists consider the destination safe to travel during the Covid-19 pandemic. Historically, tourists visited these destinations repeatedly, mainly within Europe. This was confirmed by the research of Štumpf et al. (2020) who found that tourists are motivated to visit destinations within the European Union due to similar standards of services. After the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, this motivation of tourists is deepened, as evidenced by the research of authors Wen et al. (2020). According to their findings, tourists currently prefer destinations where they expect established infrastructure and high-quality healthcare facilities. On the contrary to those findings, authors Abraham et al. (2020) stated that this motivation may no longer be the case during a pandemic and tourists may not want to visit a specific destination repeatedly.

It is the previous experience or the expected standard of services that is connected to the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic had a great influence on the way and to what extent tourists proactively search for information in advance about the destination they intend to visit. The authors agree that the destination itself should pay attention to how it declares its safety in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and can significantly influence travel decision making. Research shows that local government must communicate appropriately about personal safety and security (Samdin et al., 2021; Villacé-Molinero et al., 2021). It is this information that has a positive effect on reducing tourists' uncertainty and fear of traveling during the Covid-19 pandemic (Matiza et al., 2022). The fact that such information is also important for rural tourism destinations was confirmed by the authors of Porutiu et al. (2021). Tourists can deliberately avoid destinations that do not provide this information, thus in their eyes they behave irresponsibly about the health safety of tourists (Abraham et al., 2020). This is also confirmed by the authors' research of Teeroovengadum et al. (2021). According to their findings, tourists themselves are looking for information about what rules are applied in each destination and it is already a common standard in travel decision making. Tourist destinations must respond to this tourists' demand in order to manage to get out of the Covid 19 crisis (Da Silva Lopes et al., 2021). However, what is important to mention is that although tourists expect a responsible approach from destinations in the protection against the spread of the Covid-19 disease, they also refuse to pay more for protective measures (Sanchez-

Canizares et al., 2021). It is generally assumed that the demand for tourism will be affected by rising service prices and high inflation (Angguni and Lenggogeni 2021).

However, the perception of the risks associated with Covid-19 when travelling cannot be generalized and it is a much more complex problem that is greatly influenced by the personality of the tourist himself. After all, this is confirmed by the research of the authors Williams et al. (2022). According to their findings, it depends on the risk tolerance trait of the given. The research conducted by Aebli et al. (2022) agrees with those findings and adds that every tourist perceives the Covid-19 pandemic differently. Personality is also manifested in the fact that people deal with what others think about their behaviour. Their pandemic travel consumer behaviour influences what their loved ones think about the risk associated with Covid-19 (Sánchez-Canizares et al., 2021).

It is indisputable that the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly shaped significant changes in tourism in general and tourists have responded quickly to these changes, and we can perceive a big shift in their consumption patterns. *The aim of this research* is to find out how the visitor behavior has changed in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The case study was conducted in South Moravia region in the Czech Republic. In accordance with this aim and based on the literature review, we have developed the following research questions:

RQ1: Has tourism demand shifted from urban areas to rural areas due to the Covid-19 pandemic?

RQ2: How have visitor behavioral preferences changed in the Czech Republic as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

RQ3: What are the differences among key visitor segments in rural areas?

The research findings can help to understand how the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the preferences of visitors and can be a decision-making basis for destination management organizations, companies, and service providers that operate in the rural area, as well as for the local municipalities.

4. Methodology

The region of South Moravia (NUTS 3) was chosen for the study. This rural area is a southern part of the Czech Republic and it is a popular destination for active and recreational vacations. The region is also known for wine tourism. According to the Czech Statistical Office (2022) 1.3 million tourists were accommodated in the South Moravian Region in 2021.

For this study, a quantitative survey was conducted with a sample size of 1026 tourists. A questionnaire survey (TAPI) took place in the main season from June to September 2021 with respondents who had chosen the South Moravia region for their vacation. Respondents were interviewed face-to-face during their visit to South Moravia. The representativeness of the research sample is based on the fact that the questionnaires were obtained in relatively balanced proportions from all five tourist areas of DMO of the South Moravia region² (Brno and surroundings area; Moravian Karst area; Lednice-Valtice area; Dyje Valley and Moravian Slovakia³). Moreover, in these five areas, four of the most visited places⁴ were selected where the questionnaires were collected. We also tried to support the representativeness of the results by collecting the questionnaires at different times of the tourist season (one-third of the questionnaires in June and September and two-thirds in the high season in July, and August for each tourist area). The external control was carried out using the TAPI survey, which recorded the location (GPS) of the interviewer's collection point after sending the questionnaire. The final sample structure in terms of the target area (see Tab. 1) was influenced by a lower response rate in one destination area and

² Tourist areas of DMO: https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/145617795/turisticke_oblasti_dmo.png

³ In Czech: Brno a okolí; Moravský Kras; Lednicko-Valtický areál; Podyjí; Slovácko)

⁴ Brno and surroundings area: Tourist Information centre Old Town Hall, Spilberk Castle, Villa Tugendhat, Slavkov castle; Moravian Karst area: Punkva Caves, Katerina Caves, Lysice Castle; Lednice-Valtice area: Lednice Castle, Valtice Castle, Modré Hory area, Mikulov, Pavlov; Dyje valley: Znojmo city centre, Moravský Krumlov, Šobes area, Vranov nad Dyjí Castle; Slovácko area: Baťa canal, Plže cellars, Velehrad, Strážnice

rejecting the insufficient questionnaires from the sample. The highest sample from the Brno area is supported by the fact that this area belongs to the most visited ones in South Moravia.

Tab 1. Structure of respondents related to destination area. Source: our questionnaire survey

Destination area	%
Brno and surroundings	29
Slovácko (Moravian Slovakia)	12
Moravian Carst	20
Pálava and Lednice-Valtice area	19
Znojmo area and Dyje Valley	20
Total	100

The structure of the respondents can be seen in Table 2. and Table 3. The choice of group size as a segmentation criterion is based on the fact that rural areas are visited by tourists in smaller groups, and mainly by families (Porutiu et al., 2021). The sample structure of 89.57% of domestic visitors corresponds to the structure of total visits in South Moravia in 2021 (according to the Czech Statistical Office (2022): domestic 83.34% and foreigners 16.66%).

Tab 2. Structure of respondents. Source: our questionnaire survey

Category	Absolute N	Relative N	Category	Absolute N	Relative N
Gender			Social status		
Men	457	44.54%	Employed	583	56.82%
Women	569	55.46%	Student	180	17.54%
Age			self-employed	136	13.35%
up to 18	18	1.75%	Pensioner	82	7.99%
19–26	254	24.76%	on parental leave	40	3.90%
27–40	387	37.72%	Unemployed	5	0.49%
41–55	246	23.98%	Household income		
56–65	77	7.50%	average	761	74.21%
66 and over	44	4.29%	above average	188	18.37%
Education			below average	76	7.42%
Primary	33	3.22%			
Secondary	655	63.84%			
Higher	338	32.94%			

The study focused on three main segments – groups with children, couples and others (without children). The distribution within these three segments is provided in Table 3.

Tab 3. Distribution of respondents by segment. Source: our questionnaire survey

Segment	Absolute N	Relative N
groups with children	281	27.39%
couples	496	48.34%
others (without children)	249	24.27%

The questionnaire survey was focused on examining tourist behavior of main visitor segments within seven areas – tourist loyalty, visit decision moment, reason for the visit, duration of stay, accommodation preferences, source of information about the area and satisfaction. In the following text, the results for each of these areas are described in more details.

As part of the research, we also focused on visitor satisfaction with the quality of services in South Moravia. According to previous studies (Ryglova et al., 2017; Rasovska et.al., 2021) 21 quality factors were examined; among them 11 quality factors were chosen for further observation of differences in satisfaction among the three investigated segments (see fig.7). Other investigated quality factors which are not listed in the findings (as there were no significant differences between the satisfaction segments) are – food, tourist guides, tourist information centres, social and experiential events, active sports, natural environment, cultural monuments, friendly acceptance by the locals, sense of security, uniqueness of destination. Respondents expressed their satisfaction with quality factors using a five-point Likert scale. The Likert scale is one of the most often used psychometric tools in which respondents express their opinion or perception on a scale of answers from positive to negative (Joshi et al., 2015). For the purposes of our research, the five-point Likert scale contained the following answers: 1 – very satisfied, 2 – rather satisfied, 3 – neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4 – rather dissatisfied, and 5 very dissatisfied. We excluded the response "I don't know, I can't judge this factor" to avoid misinterpretation of the average satisfaction score. Therefore, the same number of respondents was not processed for all factors. The average number of respondents for all quality factors was 782.

5. Results and discussion

Loyalty to the rural destination among the main visitor's segments which is characterized by previous visits is shown in figure 1. The distribution of visitors in the segments was as follows – the segment “groups with children” was 27.39% of the total number of respondents, “couples even 48.34%”. This fact is consistent with the findings of authors Porutiu et al. (2021). As it can be seen in Figure 1, South Moravia was most often answered by all three segments that they visited it more than once but they do not choose it regularly as a destination. Indeed, there were significantly fewer visitors who were here for the first time. At the same time, we observe the fact that segments “couples” and “others (without children)” chose South Moravia for their visit more often compared to the segment “groups with children”. Our results are consistent with the previous findings of authors Wen et al. (2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, visitors prefer destinations where they expect standard services and infrastructure. It therefore supports the findings of Štumpf et al. (2020). According to them, tourists tend to repeatedly visit the given destination within the European Union because of the expected higher standard of services.

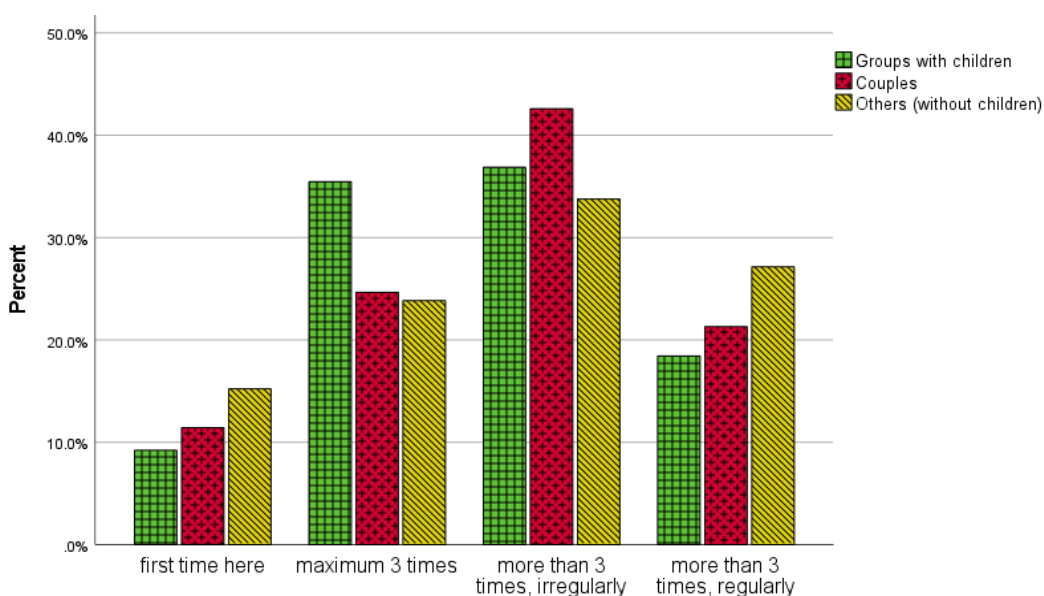


Fig 1. Loyalty to the rural destination. Source: own processing

Going through the results of visit decision moment which are summarized in Figure 2 revealed the fact that all three segments made decisions about their visit to South Moravia less than 1 month before the visit. A big difference can be observed in the fact that the segment “groups with children” planned their trip 1 month in advance, rather than segments “couples” and “others (without children)” who decided to visit South Moravia 3–14 days before the visit. Our findings confirm the general findings that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought some uncertainty and tourists are currently more cautious in planning their visit beforehand and are more likely to resort to last minute decisions (ETC, 2022) in order to limit the risk of their visit will be negatively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

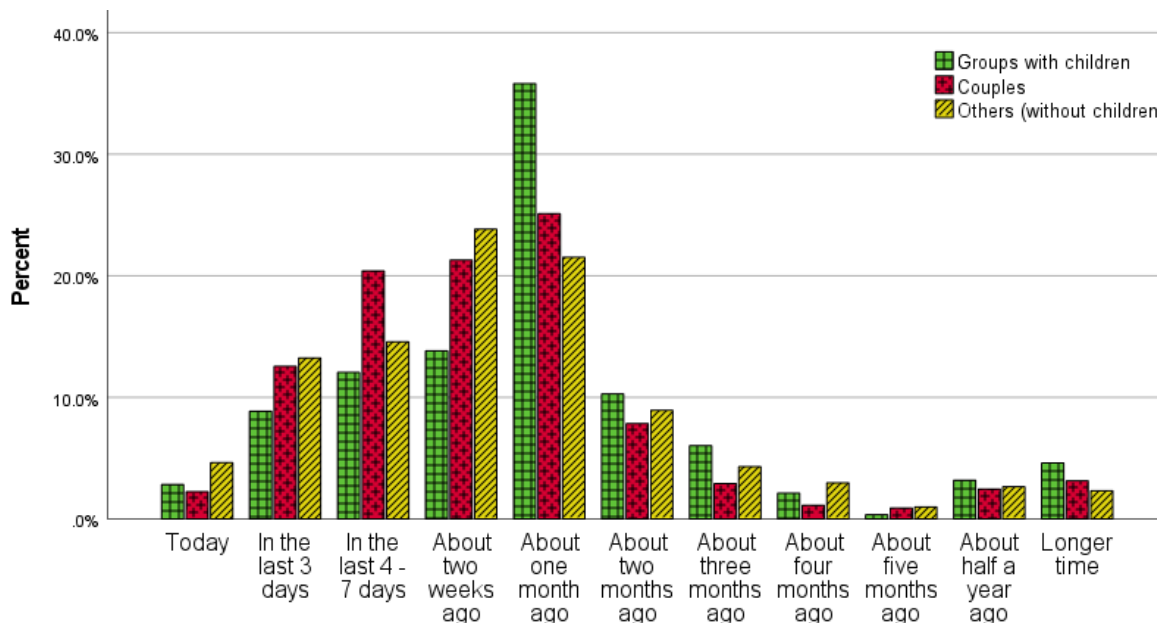


Fig 2. Visit decision moment. Source: own processing

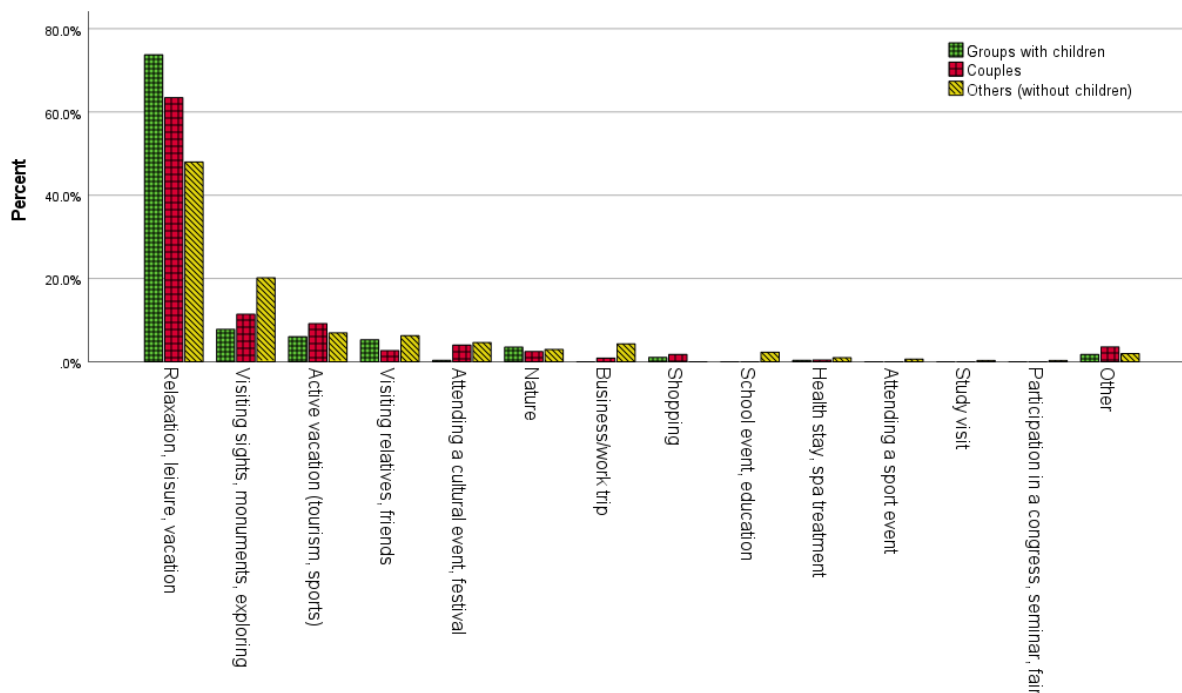


Fig 3. Reason for the visit. Source: own processing

We were also interested in what the reason for visiting South Moravia was. Despite the claims of the authors Eusébio et al. (2017) that the motivation for visiting rural areas is heterogeneous, our research shows very clearly that there is no great heterogeneity in the motivation to visit South Moravia. Figure 3 shows that the main reason for visiting South Moravia was relaxation, leisure and vacation. This reason significantly exceeds other reasons for the visit in all three segments examined. However, these findings are consistent with findings of several authors (Carneiro et al., 2017; Eusébio et al., 2017; Lewis and D’Alessandro, 2019). Relaxation, spending leisure time and vacation were mainly stated as the reason for the visit by the segment “groups with children”. Compared to the other results, we can see an interesting finding that the segment “couples” chooses South Moravia as a destination for an active vacation. The fact that a greater number of visitors choose South Moravia as a destination for visiting tourist attractions and monuments cannot be overlooked. This reason was stated especially by segment “others (without children)”. The results of our research also correspond with the four dimensions of motivation to visit rural areas as defined by Kastenholtz et al. (2017). The most frequent visited places were – Brno, Lednice, Mikulov, Valtice and Znojmo. Among tourist attractions not directly related to a cultural sight, respondents mentioned the Baťa Canal (a unique technical achievement, 53 km long and intended for recreational navigation) and the Moravian Karst (karst landscape and protected landscape area).

Figure 4 deals with the length of stay, specifically how many days visitors spend in the area. Here we can observe that all three segments in South Moravia spend a shorter time, not exceeding 1 week. Segment “groups with children” stays in South Moravia for a longer period, compared to segments “couples” and “others (without children)”. These data confirm the findings of Williams et al. (2022) that tourists prefer shorter trips to longer ones due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

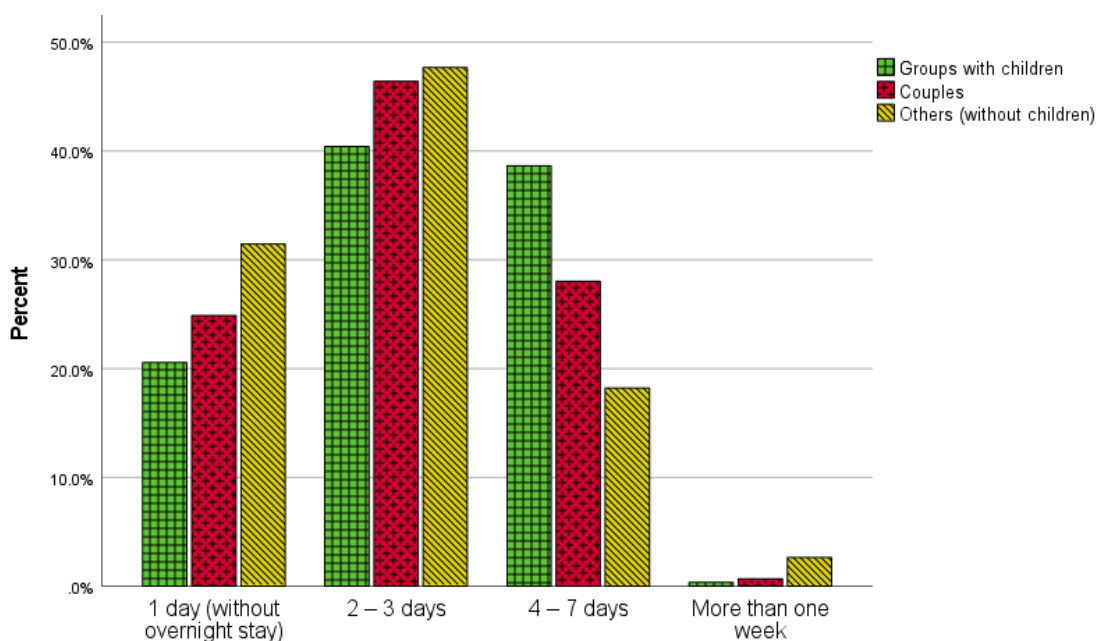


Fig 4 Length of stay. Source: own processing

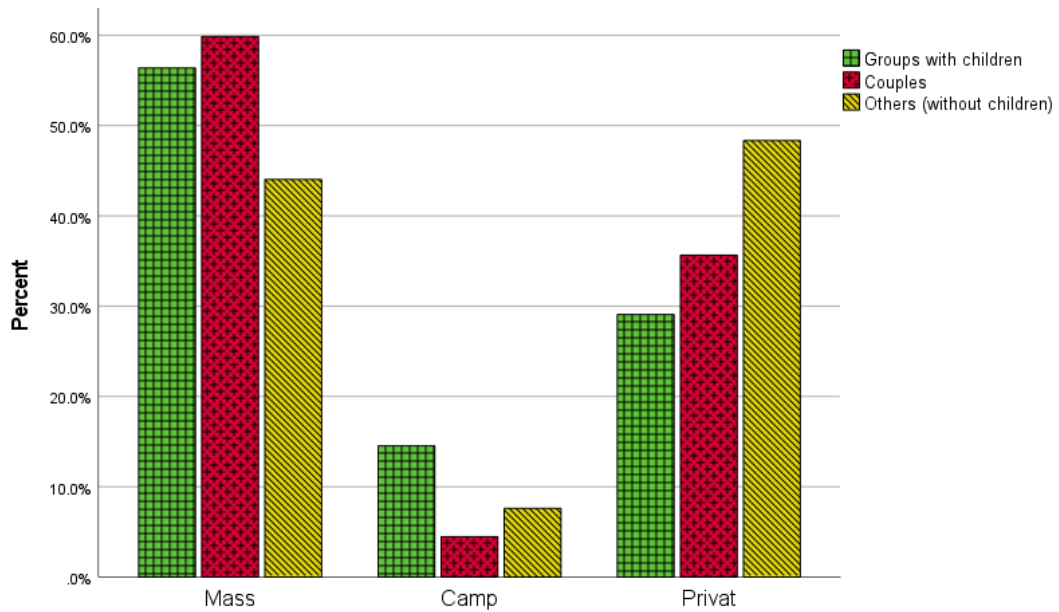


Fig 5. Accommodation preferences. Source: own processing

Further area of the research is aimed at accommodation preferences. Figure 5 shows that mass accommodations and private accommodations predominate in all three investigated segments. Mass accommodation is popular especially with the segment "couples", private accommodation is mostly chosen by the segment "others (without children)". The popularity of mass accommodation may point to the fact that most respondents were accommodated primarily in the city of Brno and its surroundings, Pálava area and the Lednice-Valtice area, Znojmo area and Dyje Valley. Private accommodation was chosen primarily by the "others (without children)" and "couples" segments. This selection can either originate from the fact that most respondents were from the Czech Republic and came to South Moravia to visit relatives. At the same time, the trend in tourism in the last decade is sharing economy, especially accommodation through Airbnb (Geron, 2013). Campsites, although not widely chosen type of accommodation, are most often chosen by the "groups with children" segment.

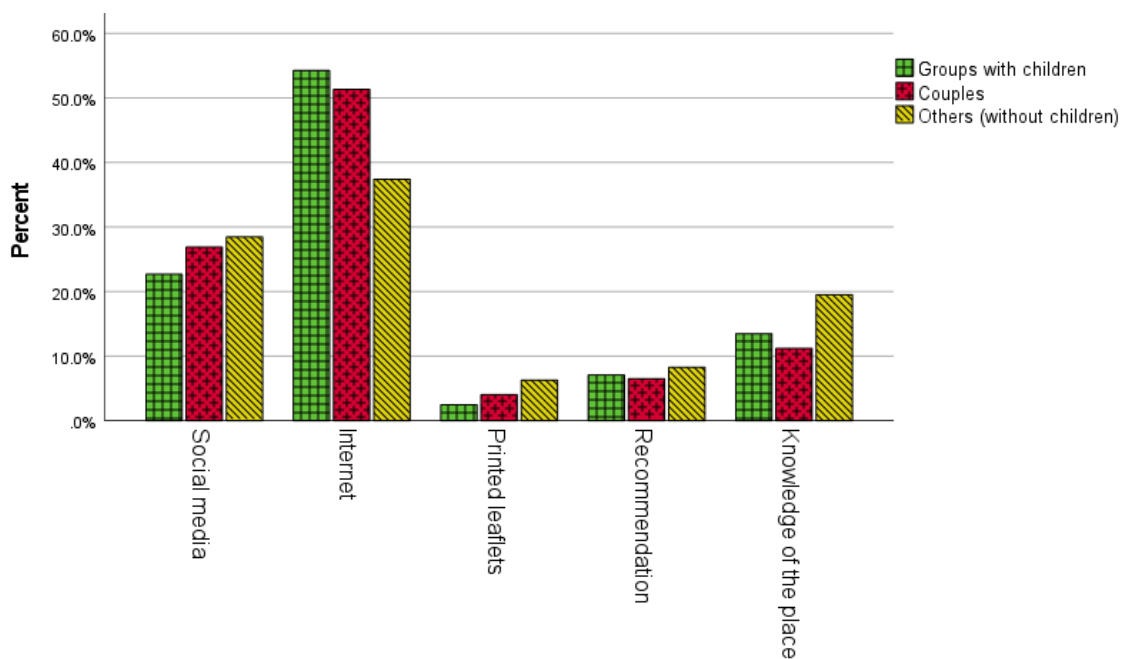


Fig 6. Source of information about the area. Source: own processing

Figure 6 is focused on information sources about the visited region. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been confirmed that tourists search for more information about their trip in advance so that they know the destination better and know the conditions that prevail there also due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Porutiu et al., 2021; Teeroovengadum et al., 2021; Matiza et al., 2022). In our research, as a source of information, the internet was significantly predominant in all three investigated segments, followed by the social media. The internet was most used by the segment "groups with children", social media by segments "others (without children)" and "couples". We can also observe the fact that all the three segments, especially the segment "others (without children)" benefited from their knowledge of the place, which may be the result of the fact that most respondents visited South Moravia repeatedly.

Figure 7 demonstrates visitors' satisfaction with the quality in the area. We can observe that the segment that was satisfied with almost all 11 examined factors was the segment "groups with children". They achieved less satisfaction only with the accommodation and tourist signage factors. In contrast, the segment "others (without children)" was the least satisfied with all selected quality factors, the worst satisfaction was for digitalization (electronic services). The "couples" segment was less satisfied with the museums and additional infrastructure factors. The sense of security, which was highlighted in previous research as a crucial factor within the Covid-19 pandemic that affects visitors (Porutiu et al., 2021; Samdin et al., 2021; Villacé-Molinero et al., 2021), was evaluated very positively by respondents in all three segments in our research within South Moravia, and no significant differences were observed among them. The most significant differences in satisfaction among the three segments were observed in quality factors related to transportation – public transportation, transportation to the destination, local transportation and parking.

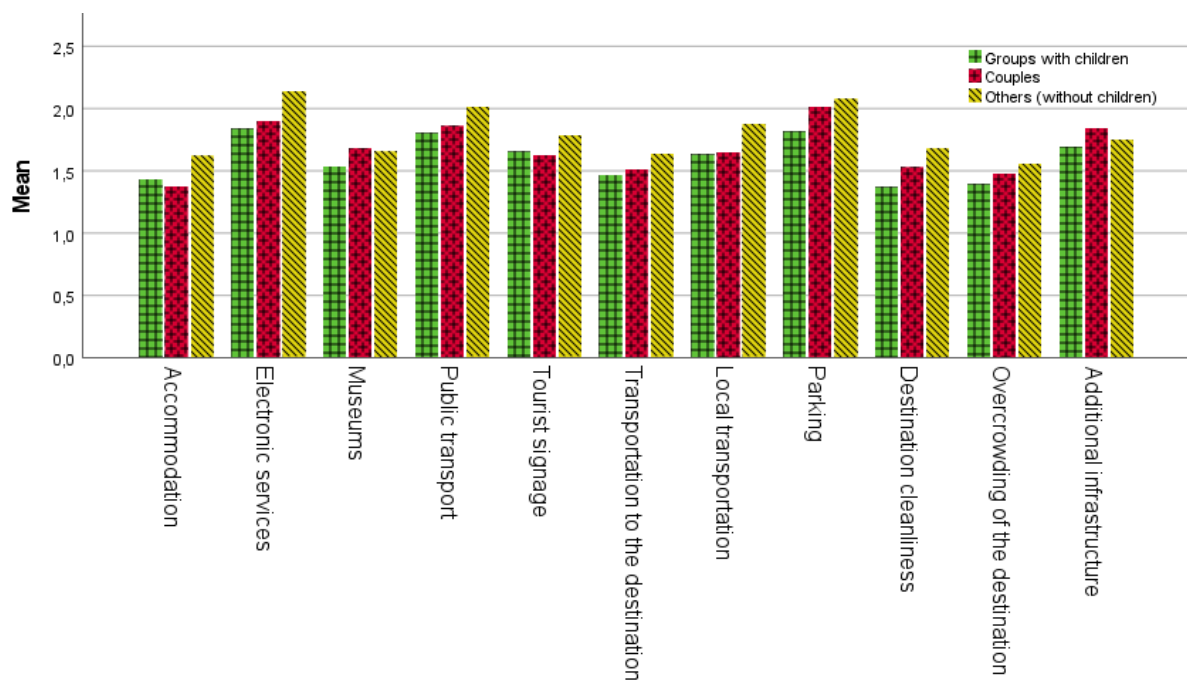


Fig 7. Satisfaction with quality factors. Source: own processing (scale: 1 – very satisfied, 2 – rather satisfied, 3 – neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4 – rather dissatisfied, and 5 very dissatisfied)

As a part of the research, the overall satisfaction of visitors to South Moravia was also determined. Based on the respondents' statements on a five-point Likert scale, 78.27% of the respondents were very satisfied with their visit, 19.49% rather satisfied. The average overall satisfaction was 1,25, the median overall satisfaction was 1. From these results, it can be judged that most respondents participating in our survey were overall satisfied with their visit to South Moravia.

6. Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly influenced the direction in which tourism has been developing in recent years. This has led to a change in the consumer behavior of tourists, and it is assumed that these changes can also be long-term (OECD, 2020). As a part of our research, we decided to examine this change in the rural area of South Moravia on three main segments (RQ3). Comparisons of the main result are shown in the Table 3.

Examining the data based on our questionnaire survey, it can be stated that the transformation from urban areas to rural areas is certainly taking place, but it is not happening completely (RQ1). Tourists do visit the rural areas of South Moravia, spend their free time here, visit the destination to relax, or even to have an active vacation and explore tourist attractions, but at the same time the data show that they choose accommodation in Brno and other small cities of South Moravia. Here, we can perceive the connection with the fact that South Moravia is a relatively small area and all tourist destinations are close to each other. Thus, tourists can benefit both from the advantages of urban areas, such as the availability of services, shops and restaurants, health infrastructure, as well as from the advantages of rural areas, such as peace, nature or the authenticity of the place.

Tab 3. Comparison of results for key segments. Source: own processing

	Groups with children	Couples	Others (without children)
Visitor loyalty	repeated visit – less than three times, or more than three times irregularly	repeated visit – more than three times irregularly	repeated visit – more than three times irregularly
Visit decision moment	about one month before the visit	two weeks to a month before the visit	two weeks before the visit
Reason for the visit	relaxation, leisure, vacation and visiting tourist attractions, monuments	relaxation, leisure, vacation and active vacation	relaxation, leisure, vacation and visiting tourist attractions, monuments
Length of stay	2–7 days	2–3 days	1–3 days
Accommodation	mass accommodation	mass accommodation	private accommodation
Information sources	internet and social media	internet and social media	Internet, social media and knowledge of the place
Satisfaction with quality factors	the most satisfied with natural environment and the least satisfied with digitalization	the most satisfied with the sense of security and the least satisfied with parking	the most satisfied with friendly acceptance by the locals and the least satisfied with digitalization

More in-depth research into the changes in preferences in the consumption behavior of tourists (RQ2) confirms the findings from previous research on this topic. Within the three segments, we have examined there are differences in the requirements they have in terms of their consumer behavior. The segment "groups with children", logically due to the fact that they travel with children, needs more security, plans the trip more in advance and stays longer at the destination. In contrast, the "couples" and "others without children" segments perceive South Moravia as an easily accessible last minute option for their trip, for example, during a long weekend. At the same time, all the three surveyed segments repeat their visit to South Moravia and mostly use their knowledge of the area as such. Companies, organizations, accommodation and hospitality establishments operating in this area could benefit from this and focus on repeatedly attracting visitors by changing their offer or adding added value to the current one. This can be created with the help of further findings about how visitors perceived quality factors.

Our research also showed that the visitors were generally quite satisfied with their visit to South Moravia. By examining specific quality factors and differences in satisfaction among our three selected segments it is possible to determine those that can be improved. The segment "groups with children" was significantly less satisfied with accommodation and tourist signage than the other two segments. The "couples" segment, on the other hand, was not very satisfied with the offer and quality of museums in the area and additional services, such as sports equipment rentals, bike paths. Satisfaction with quality differed greatly within the factors we focused on, especially in the factors related to transportation where the "groups with children" segment was the most satisfied. However, the quality of digitalization, including the availability of information, Wi-Fi coverage, applications and online booking options, is the factor for the biggest improvement. The quality of these services in the area was perceived by all three segments as the least satisfactory.

Based on these findings, we recommend improving the transportation situation in the region of South Moravia. For example, the introduction of new bus routes to reach tourist destinations easily, the increasing of these bus connections in summer months, the improvement of parking conditions at tourist destinations, or better coverage of shared bike networks, because the area of South Moravia is also suitable for this type of transport. By coordinating steps at the regional level, better transportation service can be achieved and at the same time visitor satisfaction with this factor can be increased. Improving of transportation situation in the area could be followed by a user-friendly mobile application that would inform visitors about transport options, free parking or places where they can borrow and return shared bikes. Promotion of the application can be done by distributing leaflets with information and QR code for downloading the application. These leaflets can thus be distributed to accommodation facilities, information centers, on tourist destinations or QR code can be displayed on the main tourist signages.

Since our survey was conducted with a relatively large number of respondents, it can be confirmed from its results that visitors to rural areas are mostly smaller groups, families or couples. However, visiting rural areas is generally a shorter-term option for all visitors, which does not require long-term planning. Furthermore, our findings confirmed that rural areas are especially suitable for domestic tourism. Although our results confirmed previous research and gave a deeper insight into how the consumer behavior of tourists in South Moravia has changed, it is important to realize that the changes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic may not be permanent. This fact could be a limitation of our current research. Future research could be conducted with time lag and focus on confirming whether the changes that have occurred in consumer behavior persist even after the Covid-19 pandemic. In further research, we are going to statistically confirm the dependence of the quality assessment results on the key segments; and it would be interesting to measure the dependency of a particular quality factor on the segment. Further research can also be modified and it would be possible to focus separately on domestic visitors and foreigners due to the fact that the post-covid situation is changing and the predictions also say that the number of foreigners will be increasing.

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